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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century"

Statement submitted by *Femmes solidaires*, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

In France and around the world, women's rights remain unequal. Fundamental rights such as the right to live free from violence and domination, the right to have control over one's own body and the right to live in dignity should be a reality throughout the world.

Femmes solidaires considers that the main current challenge in implementing the Beijing Platform is to combat cultural relativism. That practice undermines women's rights, especially since it is finding its way into feminist circles and attempting to curb women's progress towards increased rights.

All women around the world should enjoy the same rights, whatever their culture, origin, country of residence or religion, in order to build an equal world that is free from violence.

One of the most widespread forms of violence towards women in our world is the way in which the right to have control over one's own body is undermined. From the confiscation of birth control to the use of rape as a weapon of war, from female circumcision to the criminalization of homosexuality, women must battle constantly to secure or retain that right. Respect for that right never occurs naturally; it is not automatic.

Femmes solidaires calls on States to draw up an effective global strategy to counter the violations carried out by dominant male forces using their political, economic, social and/or religious power, and calls for the full implementation of resolution 1325.

Femmes solidaires considers poverty to be a form of violence against women. Around the world, and in France in particular, women constitute 80 per cent of the poor. There are structural reasons for such statistics — women are subject to imposed part-time working hours, wage gaps and insecure contracts. The economic crisis we are currently experiencing is sadly synonymous with social, cultural and economic deterioration, increased insecurity and poverty, social benefit cuts and sometimes decreased rights. Women are the first to suffer. *Femmes solidaires* notes that poverty fosters the development of conservative, reactionary forces, be they religious or political.

The various forms of discrimination and violence against women are myriad: domestic, economic, social, professional, physical, emotional, etc. Such violence exists at all levels of society, including in sport, the media and the cultural sphere. *Femmes solidaires* calls on all States that have ratified the relevant international conventions to respect and implement them without reservation.

Femmes solidaires requests that States act to prevent gender-based violence suffered from an early age and to break the cycle of violence by working to challenge gender-based stereotypes. Such stereotypes exist and persist within all cultures and communities.

The phenomenon concerns children in the very first months of their lives, young people but also all those involved in education — parents, educators in all fields, teachers, the media, etc. Non-sexist and non-violent education must be supported by political will, must be allocated dedicated financial and pedagogical resources and must adhere to the principles of secularism and co-education.